

Canada Salutes Mathieu Da Costa

Catching up with new issues from Canada Post, the annual Black History Month stamp for 2017 commemorates a historical figure who continues to fascinate and confound scholars.

Admittedly little is known about Mathieu Da Costa. From the few records that remain, historians conclude he was a free man who earned a living as an interpreter for Europeans who were trading with Indigenous people in the New World. Believed to be of African or even Euro-African descent, his connection to Canada came in the year 1608—the year Samuel de Champlain founded the city of Québec—when Da Costa signed a contract to work for French fur-trader, explorer and governor of Acadia, Pierre Dugua de Mons.

“While the full story of Mathieu Da Costa may never be known, interest in his life and in his unique connection with our country is a reminder of the values of respect, acceptance and diversity that Canadians cherish,” declared Canada Post President and CEO Deepak Chopra.

With no portrait of Da Costa available, designer Andrew Perro and illustrator Ron Dollekamp worked closely with Canadian historical illustrator and storyboard artist Francis Back to ensure the period clothing and sailing ship reflect De Costa’s time and socio-economic milieu.



In keeping with the effort to develop historical accuracy for a figure about whom little is known, the Official First Day Cover is cancelled in Tadoussac, Quebec, where historians believe Da Costa may have come ashore.

From Wikipedia we also learn: “His translation and communication skills helped reduce the cultural gap between early French explorers and the First Nations. His work in Canada is honoured at the Port-Royal National Historic Site in Port Royal, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia.

“A plaque at Port Royal, Nova Scotia commemorates da Costa’s contribution. It is part of the Mathieu da Costa African Heritage Trail, a series of monuments marking African Nova Scotian history in the Annapolis Valley. It was unveiled in July 2005.

“The Mathieu da Costa Challenge is an annual creative writing and artwork contest launched in 1996 by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The challenge encourages youth to discover how diversity has shaped Canada’s history and the important role that pluralism plays in Canadian society.

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